



Superior Court of California

COUNTY OF VENTURA
Hall of Justice
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Michael D. Planet
Executive Officer/Clerk
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HOMELESS COURT BECOMES AN OFFICIAL COURT PROGRAM

The judges of the Ventura Superior Court are pleased to announce that the court's Homeless Court Pilot Project is now an official court program.

Homeless Court is an alternative sentencing program that provides a mechanism for homeless individuals to resolve outstanding minor offenses through community service in lieu of fines. Most of these citations result from the condition of homelessness, such as sleeping or drinking in public, or various traffic-related infractions.

Special court sessions are scheduled at various homeless advocacy locations, effectively bringing the court to the people. Completion of community service hours is supervised and confirmed by the social worker.

Since the program's inception as a pilot project in July, 2000, 153 cases involving 65 defendants have been referred to Homeless Court. Fifty-eight defendants have successfully completed the sentence imposed in Homeless Court and 12 defendants have achieved sobriety following completion of an in-house treatment program. Over 2,700 hours of community service have been completed.

The program has the support of numerous agencies, including the City of San Buenaventura and 18 homeless advocacy agencies. Homeless Court increases access to justice for a segment of the population that often fails to appear in court to resolve minor citations. The homeless are made aware of Homeless Court services by social workers working at the homeless advocacy agencies. The social workers screen the cases for

eligibility, provide information on community service options and schedule an appearance for Homeless Court.

The Homeless Court Pilot Project was the recipient of a \$5,000 grant by the Foundation of the State Bar of California, a major contributor of seed money to important projects affecting the betterment of our communities and justice throughout the state.

Ventura County's Homeless Court program operates under the direction of Judge John E. Dobroth, whose experience presiding over the annual Operation Stand Down court for homeless veterans makes him uniquely suited to spearhead this program. The program's framework was developed through a coordinated effort by the Superior Court and representatives from the offices of the District Attorney and Public Defender, Catholic Charities, Salvation Army and other organizations serving the homeless within Ventura County.

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